Challenges to Social Development in Young Children

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Social development

is strongly related to a child's happiness in relationships and adjustment to school, work and other life circumstances. Challenges to social development in young children can arise from a variety of factors. This publication provides a brief introduction to some of these factors affecting social development in children.

Challenges to Social Development

A variety of factors can threaten successful social development. These factors may be:

- **Personal**
- **Social**
- **Environmental**

Parents and caregivers of children need to be aware of these factors and respond appropriately to assist children in overcoming any challenges.

Personal Issues

Personal factors that may impact a child's social development include the child's temperament (tendencies to be withdrawn and shy or to be overly aggressive), occurrence of ADHD (attention deficit problems) or other special needs, or physical limitations (special needs, physical features, etc.). Personal factors arise from within an individual and may require guidance, assistance or support from others.

Social Issues

Social factors that may influence a child's social development include opportunities for interaction with others, quality of relations with peers and quality of the parent-child attachment relationships. Social factors relate directly to a child's social interactions and relationships with others.

Environmental Issues

Environmental factors that may influence a child's social development include parental beliefs about children's social skills, the home atmosphere (level of conflict or stress) and the messages from media that model social interaction for children. Environmental factors involve the conditions in a child's environment that influence his or her understanding of social interaction.

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Dealing with Social Challenges

Parents and other caregivers should understand that social development in young children is not a smooth path without bumps, obstacles or challenges. Instead, it is a developmental process that involves a variety of influences on social awareness and interaction, including personal, social and environmental factors. Parents, children and caring adults or peers may need to assist children in dealing with social challenges that range from difficulty in speaking to isolation from friends to overexposure to media violence. A useful beginning point is simply to consider some of the possible social challenges that may exist for a child.

This profile is meant to help you think about factors affecting a child's social development and how important you feel their impact is on the child.

Think about the factors listed at right.

First, circle the number that shows how much the factor described affects a child you know or your own child.

Then, circle the number that describes how important you think that factor is for the child's social development.

The questions have no right or wrong answers.

This is an informal (and nonscientific) but practical tool to think about possible social challenges with children.

The Social Development Profile

This profile is meant to help you think about factors affecting a child's social development and how you feel about them. Think about the factors listed below. First, circle the number that shows how much the factor described affects your child. Then, circle the number that describes how important you think that factor is for your child's social development. There are no right or wrong answers. When you are done, think about those factors where you can assist your child.

Child's Age: _____ years, _____ months

	How much does this affect your child?					How important is it?				
	Not at all		**Sometimes**		**Often**	**Not very**		**Some**		**Very**

Personal Factors

1. Child Temperament – the child is often shy and withdrawn in social situations

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

2. Child Temperament – the child is often out of control or overly aggressive in social situations

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3. ADHD – the child seems to have attention deficit or related challenges

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4. Special Challenges – the child has a physical disability or challenge that makes social interaction more difficult

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Social Factors

5. Opportunities for Interaction – the child has few available peers or chances for interaction

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. Peer Interaction – the child interacts with peers who are poor role models or a negative influence

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7. Parent-Child Attachment – the child experiences troubles or distance in the relationship with parents

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Environmental Factors

8. Parental Beliefs – the child's parent(s) believes social skills cannot be developed or changed

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9. Home Atmosphere – the child lives in an environment of high stress or conflict

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10. Media Culture – the media culture emphasizes violence and poor social models rather than peaceful conflict resolution and good social models

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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